

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

Annual General Meeting

held at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

on Friday 27th April 2018

MINUTES

Present:

Chair – Gordon Robertson (GR) (Assynt Foundation)
Vice-Chair – David Allison (DA) (Reay Forest) *arrived 5 minutes into meeting*
Mark White (MW) (Glencassley)
John Venters (JV) (Assynt Foundation)
Claire Belshaw (CB) (Assynt Foundation)
James Vestey (JV) (Benmore Assynt)
Nin Vestey (NV) (Benmore Assynt)
Craig Ross (CR) (Inchnadamph)
Bruce Blackley (BB) (Benmore Assynt)
Chris Gordon (CG) (Duchally/Invercassley)
Claire Acheson (CKD Galbraith – Eisg Brachaidh)
Ray Mackay (Assynt Crofters' Trust – North Assynt Estate)
Jorine Van Delft (JVD) (Culag Community Woodlands Trust – Little Assynt)
Joseph Lord (JL) (Culag Community Woodlands Trust – Little Assynt)
Fiona Saywell (FS) (Culag Community Woodland Trust – Little Assynt and CALLP)
Romany Garnet (RG) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Don O'Driscoll (DOD) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Julian Moreau (JM) (John Muir Trust)
Mark Foxwell (MF) (Scottish Wildlife Trust – Benmore Coigach)
Michelle Henley (MH) (Scottish Wildlife Trust – Benmore Coigach)
Alan Balfour (AB) (Scourie)
Henry Bulmer (HB) (Keanchulish)
Mark Mackenzie (MM) (Keanchulish)

In Attendance:

Holly Deary (HD) (SNH)
Richard Cooke (RC) (ADMG)
Tom Chetwynd (TC) (ADMG)
Kirsty MacLeod (KM) Group Secretary

1. Chairman's Welcome

GR opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and stating that the DMG was on the right track towards meeting the requirements.

2. Apologies:

Michael Ross (Ardvar)
Mark Angelides (Middle Inver)
Crispian Cook (Bell Ingram)
Robbie Galloway (RG) (Tenant, Duchally)
David Davies (Inverpolly)
Jim Sloane (Kylesku)
Marcus Munro (MM) (Highland Shooting Centre – Ledmore Lodge)
Andy Hibbert (Loch Assynt Lodge)

Mike Daniels (John Muir Trust)
Iain Thomson (Sallachy)
George Vestey (Inchnadamph)
Dr Jean Balfour (JB) (Scourie)
Sue Agnew (SA) (SNH)
PC Daniel Sutherland

3. Election of Office Bearers

The Chair stepped down and handed the meeting to TC. TC informed the meeting that GR had agreed to be put forward as Chair and asked if there were any other nominations. FS proposed GR and CG seconded. JV nominated DA as Vice-Chair, seconded by CR.

TC handed the meeting back to the Chair.

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13th November 2017

The minutes were agreed (proposed by RM, seconded by CG)

5. Matters Arising from the minutes of the last meeting:

Per agenda.

6. Deer Management Plans

GR stated that DMPs had never assumed such importance as now. The Sub-groups were at varying stages of the process, but we do not want the DMG to be judged by the poorest performer. He was conscious that his own Sub-group was that at present.

West (Assynt Peninsula)

GR said there had been a lot of progress with the help of VC.

RM reported that the Plan was finalised, and had been informally looked at by HD at SNH. They had come off the bottom rung and now in the middle. A further sub-group was working on the Working Plan to accompany the DMP, generally positive progress. The APSG meets regularly, there have been more meetings recently but at least twice per year. The next meeting is in May, which Mike Cantley of SNH was due to attend. There would be a Working Plan meeting at the same time. Meetings are minuted and copies of minutes sent to the WSDMG Secretary, so they can be circulated/published on the website. DoD is Vice Chair. Minutes etc. all done on a voluntary basis. It was noted that the DMG Constitution may need to be amended, per VC's suggestions.

The Chair congratulated the Sub-Group on its progress.

South

GR noted that this Sub-group was bottom of the list in terms of progress. However they have now employed VC to write the DMP and are determined to take it forward.

North

DA reported that the Sub-group was on schedule, and the commitment to count in 2018 was carried out. They would be reviewing targets following the results of the count, received today.

Habitat Monitoring – it had been agreed that they would ask for training on woodland habitat monitoring as they had not done that (only heath). Reay Forest is carrying out 30ha of consolidation and expansion planting this year. There was a need to review Working Plan actions on the back of the recent SNH interim assessment, and would appreciate an informal review from SNH. DA said he was happy to share the table for others to use the same format. DA referred to the need for minuting meetings.

General

There was discussion about how to get progress reports to the wider population and whether to maintain the four sub-groups under the WSDMG banner or separate entirely. KM was happy to collate information from Sub-groups and send updates to local papers. KM also happy to write up minutes but could not commit to attending all the Sub-group meetings. RC talked about Grampian having separate Sub-groups operating independently but still under the banner of the main DMG, which seems to work well.

East

KM read out a report received from Iain Thomson by email:

The sub group is planning to meet at the end of June to discuss mortalities, recruitment, ongoing culls, habitat monitoring data and if we need to bring forward the helicopter count to 2019. This year the population model has been updated to show actual cull, recruitment and mortality data rather than predicted. The model and the plan will be updated again in June to show mortality and recruitment data for this year and the habitat monitoring map will be updated with plots colour coded to show level of impact, so that any issues can be discussed at the June meeting. Also at this meeting the subgroup will start to set out how we will deal with impacts in the wider habitat and incorporate this in to the plan.

Subnote – KGM to ask IT for non-member Caplich estate's cull figures for the Cull Statistics table

2019 Assessment

HD talked about the performance assessment. RC reiterated ADMG's offer to two days of consultancy to assess where Sub-groups are – a "health check" based on the 101 criteria. Half of these were to do with meetings, which are the benchmark and should be green. Public Interest criteria more difficult. RC felt that the last review was unfair as the criteria were changed midway through the process. A meeting had been held between ADMG and SNH to discuss how groups are to be judged, and how they can move from yellow to green. The format of the reports from the recent interim assessments was a result of that. The Health Check would go beyond assessment to look at meeting future as well as current criteria. The next review should reflect those changes, and he would be disappointed if that was not the case. He hoped it would focus on what has been achieved rather than what has not been done. He was proud of the industry's progress, what had been viewed as a traditional and backward looking industry but has moved to self-analysis. The industry is judged on soundbites so this will hopefully broaden knowledge. It is about addressing the points, not expecting habitats to have changed by 2019, and keep monitoring progress.

Woodland Habitat Assessment courses are being run by Helen Armstrong from FE. Techniques are still being developed, but Best Practice unchanged.

GR informed the meeting that FE offer a free service advising on what can be done in terms of woodland development on a site by site basis. Grants are so enhanced now that you can virtually do it for nothing. Assynt Foundation are doing one with a potential profit of £210,000.

HD confirmed that she and Sinclair Coghill are the SNH link to South Sub-Group, and HD for East, North and West (AP).

It was agreed to accept the offer of assessment from ADMG for those sub-groups requiring this service.

Population model is the key thing in all DMPs, with capacity to update, and planning as a result of that.

HD confirmed that SNH is still funding for groups without a plan. S7 already in place for Inverpolly could be expanded to cover the South Sub-Group.

DA said an action for North Sub-group was to update the population model and feed into master model. HD's report to be circulated to wider membership. ACTION KGM

7. SNH Report

HD said it was a mixed bag across West Sutherland DMG. Advised to make sure Sub-groups are feeding back into the DMG. Assessments in 2019 will be on the same criteria as 2014 and 2016, and SNH expects to see progress on certain areas – counting, cull planning, HIA. SNH will keep feeding back so there are no surprises at formal assessments, including after meetings. There is disparity in HIA across the Sub-groups, and of members within the Sub-groups.

AB asked if SNH was assessing Sub-groups or assessing WSDMG. HD responded that it is the Sub-groups that are assessed, but some things could be done on a DMG level – e.g. training.

There was further discussion on the role of the DMG. It is a bureaucratic function mainly, but as DA said it is also a shared resource. If the Sub-groups became separate DMGs each would require its own office bearers, bank account, website etc.

HD brought up previous discussions about mapping deer movements. A meeting is to be called with Chairs of Sub-groups to discuss this, which can inform further discussion on whether to formally split

into 4 sub-groups. RC said to bear in mind that deer are still a shared resource within the wider group area. ACTION GR/KGM

8. ADMG Report

TC referred to GR's email summary of the recent ADMG meeting, which summarised the key points. The Deer Working Group, appointed in 2017 by the Scottish Government, was still collecting information, and would be reporting in 2019 (same time as SNH review).

Scottish Wild Venison PGI (Protected Geographical Indicator) Consultation closes on 16th May 2018, and members are urged to respond. It could lead to similar marketing strategy as Stornoway black pudding and Scotch Lamb.

Venison contaminations – if FSS identified substandard practices at a processing plant, it could shut it down with potentially catastrophic consequences for the industry.

Sporting Rates

RC had discussed the split of sporting vs cull with Assessor. FE came up top in terms of value, which made no sense. Lobbying continues, and hopefully sense will prevail. RC felt this was a political measure associated with Land Reform.

Small Business Bonus Relief is being applied fairly quickly when requested. You do not get it unless you apply for it. Most estates are eligible, unless they have high value hotels/holiday let properties etc. SBBR might be scrapped or changed in future. Appeals are also important, or you may miss your chance.

TC mentioned the Stalking Rent Survey. Previous one was in 2011. Data gathering this summer, with an interim report in 2019.

Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) are offering pre-assessments of larder facilities.

ADMG holding workshops, one on 6th June after the Regional Meeting at Birnam, and on 7th June in Inverness. For Chairs and Secretaries but open to other interested parties.

In summary – there is more pressure on DMGs to perform. TC is here to help if he can – please direct queries to the Secretary in the first instance, who will forward to him.

RC referred back to the contamination issue. FSS had inspected Highland Game in Dundee and premises clear so it must have been a carcass. Ten people had been very ill, probably from undercooked burgers. Because it was Ecoli-157 FSS was now interested. The derogation to legislation allowing local sales and Local Authorities not doing their bit could create problems for the industry. Please make sure you are dealing with carcasses properly, follow HACCP, and if you know anyone who is not FSS has an anonymous hotline. The Hunter is expected to decide if the carcass is OK. If in doubt, don't send to the dealer.

9. CALLP (Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership)

FS referred to her note on HIA training, which had been circulated recently. The paper has been updated and is to be circulated with these minutes. ACTION KGM

GR asked if Reay Forest could host a training day, since they are relatively far ahead in terms of HIA. FS said Assynt Crofters' Trust had expressed interest, as had other APSG members.

There were opportunities for venison collaboration. There are only two dealers [in this area] and some might be willing to put names of estates on packaged products to sell locally.

DA asked if there was potential to assist with data management. FS confirmed that this had been added to the revised paper, in point 5.

HD referred to the argument about the wider group, some estates are doing a lot but need to share their information and use it to inform deer management.

Some estates might not realise what they need to do – all are required to carry out HIA, not just those with designated areas on their land.

The Sward programme (within SRDP) was referred to. HD said this is still in development. It will be useful when up and running but still some way off so need to use other methods.

DA felt it was frustrating that there is no central collection point for data. The Scottish Government does not have a template/format for info in order to feed it back. It would be good to have a summary data sheet, colour coding areas where things are fine and where action is required.

RC said SNH was slow to bring forward the tools needed to meet its requirements. He went on to say that ADMG and SNH have a good working relationship.

10. Accounts

Accounts for the year to date were circulated. Copy attached.

KM pointed out that the DMG is currently underfunded, and that the levy had been at £1.20 per stag for many years (at least 14 since she had become Secretary). It had always been quite tight, but there were now additional costs of website hosting and increased secretarial fees. NWSDMG currently charges £2 per stag and £1 per hind culled for its group levy on a previous year basis rather than 5 year average. ADMG uses five year averages to calculate its annual levy.

It was agreed to proceed on a similar basis, i.e. £2 per stag and £1 per hind, on top of the ADMG levy, using the 5 year average as before. ACTION KGM

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of Friday 9th November 2018 was pencilled in.

KGM will circulate members early October to confirm or agree another date. ACTION KGM

12. AOCB

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) require a Privacy Policy to be in place and those whose contact data is held to be asked agree to such. Deadline is 25th May. ADMG are working on this.

TC mentioned social media. Grampian Moorland Group had set up social media accounts, and wondered if there was an appetite to form a Northern Moorland Group. JV as a regular Facebook user thought this was a good idea. TC was keen that it did not become a deer only related group, but cover all types of land use. The Kintail DMG has called its DMP a Land Management Plan. TC to put together a proposal to be circulated. ACTION TC/KGM

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed at 3:24pm